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Translating the French Revolution into English in *A Tale of Two Cities*

1 In his preface to *A Tale of Two Cities*, Andrew Sanders points out that the novel is 'balanced between two cities and between two languages', that Dickens introduces the reader with 'bilingual characters (Manette, Darnay, Carton)' and that he also experiments with 'the device of literally translating the idioms of his monoglot francophones (the Defarges and the Jacques) into English' (Dickens ix). This last strategy was described by James Fitzjames Stephen, who reviewed the novel for *The Saturday Review* in December 1859, as 'misbegotten jargon'.[1] This leads us to reflect on what Dickens was trying to achieve in adopting what Sylvère Monod called an 'Anglo-French language' (Monod 429–31) composed of English words but borrowing syntactic forms from the French, or translating French set phrases literally into English. In endeavouring to address this question, this article will argue that this new form of English sprinkled with Gallicisms was part and parcel of Dickens's strategy to translate the French Revolution into English.

2 As a matter of fact, the French Revolution remained rather a mystery for the English. They had followed it from the outside and even when, like Mary Wollstonecraft and other English Romantic artists, they had found themselves at the heart of revolutionary events, they still could not quite grasp its idiosyncrasies. The Revolution remained in many ways very French, but it was nonetheless also a key episode in the history of Britain and the history of Europe as a whole. For that very reason, it deserved further investigation. However, the difficulty lay in fathoming its singularity and rendering it understandable to British readers. Dickens's Anglo-French language was a way of rising to the challenge. By creating this idiom, Dickens highlighted some of the metaphysical questions underlying the French Revolution. He also used this language as a way of conjuring up in words the conditions that led to the French Revolution. This implied translating specific revolutionary words into English.

Metaphysical Implications of the French Revolution

3 Dickens uses his Anglo-French idiom to reveal metaphysical questions underlying the French Revolution, such as the idea and meaning of goodness, or the issues of stasis and change.[2] When Monsieur Defarge leads Mr Lorry and Lucie Manette to the garret where Doctor Manette has been staying since his liberation from the Bastille, his salutation to Doctor Manette, 'Good day!' is a rendering of the French 'bonjour' (Dickens 41). The expression 'Good day' was also used in English at the time, usually as a parting salutation, though it could also be found as a greeting. Here however 'Good Day' has a double emphasis, in that Dickens positioned it at the very beginning of the chapter and added an exclamation mark. The salutation is also associated, in most of its later occurrences in the novel, with other Anglo-French words, for instance 'Good day, madame' (Dickens 173) or 'Good day citizen' (Dickens 265). All of this makes it part of the Anglo-French language developed by Dickens in *A Tale of Two Cities*, all the more so as it is only used by the French characters in the novel. In this scene, the expression 'Good day' strikingly clashes with the oppressive atmosphere in which it is uttered.

4 Throughout the novel 'Good day' will invariably be uttered in similar circumstances. In this particular instance, the daylight alluded to in the salutation jars with the darkness of Doctor Manette's 'dim and dark' cell, which hardly ever sees the light of day: 'such a scanty portion of light was admitted through these means that it was difficult, on first coming in, to see anything' (Dickens 40). 'Good day' also clashes with Doctor Manette's condition as a former Bastille prisoner now turned into a quasi-prisoner in Defarge's garret, where he is locked in, supposedly for his own good (Dickens 40). The French greeting strikes the reader as involuntarily ironic on the part of Monsieur Defarge, and as definitely so on the part of Dickens. This new meaning of the French salutation will be confirmed and strengthened as the novel unfolds. Thus, when Monsieur Defarge enters the wine-shop with Jacques Five,

he wishes the assembled company 'Good day' and immediately adds 'It is bad weather, gentlemen' (Dickens 159). This again leads the reader to reconsider the intrinsic meaning of the French word 'bonjour'.

5 The meaning of goodness is again at stake in an exchange of words between 'Monseigneur', a cruel and haughty Marquis—whose generic name epitomises French aristocracy in the novel—and one of his subjects, as Monseigneur's carriage reaches the village and château that belong to him. The woman addressing the Marquis is the wife of the local forester. Her husband has just died of want and she is begging for a tombstone or a cross to be erected above his grave. As the Marquis asks her whether she expects him to feed all the needy, she replies: 'Monseigneur, the good God knows; but I don't ask it (Dickens 112)', before reiterating the modest nature of her petition. The literal translation from the French 'Monseigneur, le bon Dieu le sait' again draws attention to a word that goes unnoticed in French, namely the word 'good' in the set phrase 'le bon Dieu'. The metaphysical question of God's benevolence and of godly intentions and possible injustices is raised here through the use of Gallicisms, while the woman's harrowing repetition of the word 'Monseigneur, Monseigneur' makes her haunting supplication a symbol of people's oppression in pre-revolutionary France.

6 The Franco-English lingua of *A Tale of Two Cities* is also a way of broaching the ideas of stasis and of change at the core of the French Revolution. Monsieur Defarge's exchanges with inhabitants of the suburb of Saint Antoine are interspersed with formulas directly drawn from the French language, for instance interrogative forms such as 'Say then my Gaspard, what do you do here?' (*Dis, donc, Gaspard, que fais-tu ici* ?) (Dickens 34) affirmative clauses such as 'It is not often that…' (*ce n'est pas souvent que…)* (Dickens 36), and question and answer tags such as 'Is it not so, Jacques?' (*n'est-ce pas Jacques ?*) and 'It is so, Jacques' (Dickens 36):

> 'How goes it, Jacques?' said one of these three to Monsieur Defarge. 'Is all the spilt wine swallowed?'
>
> 'Every drop, Jacques,' answered Monsieur Defarge.
>
> . . . 'It is not often,' said the second of the three, addressing Monsieur Defarge, 'that many of these miserable beasts know the taste of wine, or of anything but black bread and death. Is it not so, Jacques?'
>
> 'It is so, Jacques,' Monsieur Defarge returned. (Dickens 36)

7 The French clause 'how goes it' has come to mean 'how things stand in the present circumstances', but in the English transposition of this set phrase, the verb 'to go' is foregrounded because the sentence sounds stilted. This preserves and highlights the sense of motion the verb contains. Could Defarge's question somehow already foreshadow the vast crowd movements that will typify the French Revolution as depicted later in the novel and as already hinted at in the wine cask scene? In contrast to this potential movement, the French tag questions and answers '*n'est-ce pas*' and '*c'est ainsi*', which would normally be translated into English as 'do they' and as 'no they don't', are rendered literally by 'It is not often', 'Is it not so' and 'It is so', tags emphasising the verb 'to be'. This unexpected translation emphasises the duration of the people's wretchedness, thereby highlighting a state of stasis which paves the way for discontent and resentment.

8 The idea of revenge is another metaphysical question raised by *A Tale of Two Cities*. The novel is pervaded with difficult questions related to revenge and vengeance, two words derived from Old French, namely 'revencher' for revenge and 'venger' for vengeance. Revenge is seen as the inevitable outcome of aristocratic oppression during the pre-revolutionary period. Furthermore, the question of whether the crimes of the fathers justify revenge upon their children is raised by Madame Defarge's insistence on punishing Charles Darnay for the rape committed by his father and uncle. The whole of Book III seems to act out a tragedy of revenge in that the French people turn against their oppressors only to become in turn oppressors themselves, while individual characters, like Madame Defarge, are engaged in the grim pursuit of wreaking deadly revenge on those who did them harm. Charles Darnay's fate, which seems to be to die for his family's crimes, is only averted by the timely sacrifice of Sydney Carton who takes Darnay's place. The revenge devised by Madame Defarge falls flat, but the outcome

nonetheless spells out a tragedy though not the one planned by the revolutionaries. This tragedy puts an end to the spiral of violence and thereby to revenge.

9 Of the two words 'revenge' and 'vengeance', Dickens chooses to personify the word 'vengeance' in the form of a female. In so doing, he refers implicitly to the French language which gives the word a feminine gender, namely 'la vengeance': 'The short, rather plump wife of a starved grocer, and the mother of two children withal, this lieutenant had already earned the complimentary name of The Vengeance' (Dickens 213). Dickens's allegory counterbalances other French pictorial representations of the Revolution, such as Eugène Delacroix's *La Liberté guidant le peuple* (1830)[3]—a painting officially depicting the July Revolution of 1830 but unmistakeably infused with reminiscences of the French Revolution. *A Tale of Two Cities* offers an interpretation of the French Revolution as being more about retaliation and retribution than about freedom. The word 'vengeance' gradually becomes an allegory and, once the personification is completed, the word hardly ever appears in the text again as an ordinary noun. Its French undertones have taken over and the different meanings gradually produced by previous allusions to vengeance coalesce in this Franco-English personification. Thus the intrinsic violence of crowds—whether they be English or French—and their vengeful mood (Dickens 151), or the slow to occur, but all the more terrible vengeance considered by Madame Defarge against the people's oppressors (Dickens 171), or even Doctor Manette's unbearable desire for vengeance during his imprisonment at the Bastille (Dickens 182), are all brought together in a symbolic figure whose name has French echoes and connects the idea of revenge with France and the French Revolution. The Vengeance is the leading figure who remains on the scene after Madame Defarge has disappeared. Neither the injured party (Madame Defarge) nor the descendent of those who injured her (Darnay) is present at the final decapitation. All that is left is pure vengeance with no purpose other than itself, and this seems to corroborate Dickens's vision of the French Revolution. This vision is in part confirmed by the national revolutionary motto taken up by Dickens—'Republic One and Indivisible, of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, or Death!'—in which, in keeping with the 'Law of Suspects' voted in September 1793, the words 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity' go hand in hand with the idea of vengeance and retribution in the form of 'death' for anyone suspected of being an enemy of the Republic One and Indivisible.

Paving the Way for the French Revolution

10 Besides emphasising metaphysical issues underlying the French Revolution, Dickens resorts to his Franco-English idiom to call attention to the conditions that led to the outbreak of the Revolution. He set out to conjure up these conditions in words, and French is part and parcel of his strategy. First of all he uses it to convey a feel of the French language to his readers and plunge them into the atmosphere of the time. He does so by translating French sentences and set phrases literally into English. Native English-speaking readers are disconcerted by dialogues that are in English but strike them as stilted and odd. After the wine has been spilled, the owner of the wine-shop asks the man who scrawled the word 'Blood' on the wall: 'Say, then, my Gaspard, what do you do there?' (Dickens 34) which is a literal translation of '*Dis donc, Gaspard. Qu'est-ce que tu fais là?*'. The jarring grammar in the English transposition throws the reader off balance. The language spoken is made up of English words but unmistakeably reminds anyone familiar with French syntax of a French sentence. This produces a feeling of strangeness, which separates the French scenes of the novel from the English scenes. The Franco-English lingua creates a sense of distance and sets pre-revolutionary France and the French Revolution at a triple remove from Dickens's English readers: a linguistic distance is added to a spatial and a time divide. This produces a reassuring boundary between France and England, though this dividing line is called into question by an uncomfortable awareness of many resemblances between the two countries. This consciousness is in fact brought about in part by the Franco-English language, which, on closer analysis, is not completely different from, nor quite the same as English, as exemplified by the following dialogue which takes place just before Jacques Five, alias the mender of roads, relates the fate of Monseigneur's murderer. In this English exchange, the words 'repast' and 'commencement' sound decidedly

French. Having greeted the assembly with a 'good day, gentlemen' and having been answered with the same salutation by the men present in the wine-shop, Defarge goes on to say 'Give him to drink, my wife' a literal translation of '*donne lui à boire, ma femme*'. Once the man has taken some nourishment, Defarge enquires 'Have you finished your repast, friend?' (Dickens 159)—again a literal translation of '*As-tu fini ton repas, l'ami?*' The man being now ready, he is shortly after encouraged to speak. He asks Defarge: 'Where shall I commence, monsieur?' and is told 'Commence… at the commencement' (Dickens 160). The word 'commencement', which echoes the very same word in French, highlights the beginning of the man's narrative: a French story embedded in the main English narrative and a story whose consequences on the main plot and on the course of history will prove to be momentous.

11 In *A Tale of Two Cities* Dickens does not just create an Anglo-French idiom to give readers an inkling of the French language, he also uses it to hint at the state of servitude of French lower classes at the hands of the privileged classes and of absolute monarchy. The wine-shop scene provides an instructive example of this strategy: the reader is bemused as he or she reads Monsieur Defarge's thoughts about Lucie and Mr Lorry when he first catches sight of them: 'What the devil do *you* do in that galley there?' (Dickens 35). This translates back into idiomatic French as '*Que diable venez-vous faire dans cette galère*?', a sentence that is all the more idiomatic as it is an allusion to Molière's play, *Les Fourberies de Scapin.* To make sense in English, it could be translated with the expression 'what on earth are you doing in this hornet's nest?' However, the literal translation into English provided by Dickens makes no immediate sense to an English reader unfamiliar with French. It nonetheless draws attention to the oddity of the phrase and highlights the words 'devil' and 'galley' which have become dead metaphors in the French phrase where they are taken for granted.[4] In this scene, these two words somehow corroborate the ambivalent impressions already aroused when reading the scene relating how a cask falls and spills wine onto the street. The sense of celebration, pleasure and revelry conveyed by this episode was counterbalanced at the time by an unsettling feeling of danger and a vision of wretched misery epitomised by the relentless repetition of the word 'Hunger' (Dickens 32–33). This hint of darkness seems to be confirmed by the words 'devil' and 'galley' transposed from a French set phrase and revived in Monsieur Defarge's parlance.

12 In contrast to the people's plight, Dickens uses his Anglo-French idiom to underline and indict the outrageous luxury and superficiality of aristocratic life as he imagined it to be. In the chapter devoted to Monseigneur in Town, English syntax remains unscathed but the narrative is sprinkled with literal translations of French words and expressions intended to convey a more vivid sense of pre-revolutionary life. Dickens has kept the French word '*Monseigneur*' and refrained from using the English equivalent 'his Grace'. Monseigneur takes his chocolate in the best room of his grand hotel in Paris and the room is referred to as 'The Holiest of Holiests', that is a literal translation of the French expression '*Le Saint des Saints*' (Dickens 100). The English for this should have been 'The Holy of Holies', but Dickens has chosen to transpose the French expression. His translation resembles the English expression but with a twist. It creates a sense of familiarity mixed with strangeness and strengthens Dickens's description of the chocolate ceremonial as a grotesque parody of a religious ritual. Similarly, Monseigneur's chocolate is served by four lacqueys, and here Dickens uses the French-sounding word 'lacquey' rather than the word 'footman' (Dickens 100). The reader also learns that Monseigneur has 'been out at a little supper' the night before. This expression '*petit souper*' meant a refined dinner gathering only a few select guests. In this particular case 'The Comedy and the Grand Opera were charmingly represented' (Dickens 100). 'Comedy'—translated from the French, 'La Comédie'—means the theatre but the word is also infused with its English meaning, namely comic theatre—a meaning also encapsulated in the French word '*comédie*'. The personification of 'Comedy' and 'the Grand Opera' conjure up farcical and grotesque images à la Gillray[5] of extravagant and dissolute aristocrats surrounded by actresses and opera singers and dancers.[6] This image fits English prejudices about French aristocrats before the Revolution and about Parisian life. It also reinforces Dickens's portrayal of the aristocracy of the *Ancien Régime* as a world of illusion and artifice akin to the theatre. Monseigneur's inability to manage his wealth is also expressed in French-sounding words:

'Vulgar embarrassments' seem to echo the very words or thoughts of Monseigneur regarding his resources. 'finances public' and 'finances private' are modelled—word order included—on '*finances publiques*' and '*finances privées*' and parody official French discourses on the state of the Nation and its inhabitants:

> Yet, Monseigneur had slowly found that vulgar embarrassments crept into his affairs, both private and public; and he had, as to both classes of affairs, allied himself perforce with a Farmer-General. As to finances public, because Monseigneur could not make anything at all of them, and must consequently let them out to somebody who could; as to finances private, because Farmer-Generals were rich, and Monseigneur, after generations of great luxury and expense, was growing poor. (Dickens 100)

13 The 'Farmer-General' or tax collector, whom Monseigneur becomes allied to, is depicted as a 'sumptuous' man—from the French '*somptueux*'—expressing both his extravagant expenditures and his ostentatious attire which contrasts with the people's wretched appearance likened by the narration to 'scarecrows in rags and nightcaps' (Dickens 101).

14 Befittingly, Monsieur le Marquis is depicted as a cruel villain and his speech, though semantically correct, is modelled on French syntax to create a sense of distance and foreignness: 'My nephew,' said the Marquis, glancing at the supper preparations; 'they said he was not arrived'; 'Ah! It is not probable he will arrive to-night…' (Dickens 114). The arrival of Monsieur le Marquis in his château introduces a Gothic atmosphere of darkness, mystery and suspense increased by the use of French and French-sounding words, which produce a feeling of the Uncanny understood as strangeness mixed with familiarity.[7] In addition to '*Monsieur le Marquis*' and '*château*', the word '*flambeau*'—rather than the more familiar word 'torch'—occurs frequently and is even foregrounded by unusual syntax as shown by Knud Sørensen (Sørensen 1985). The flambeaux or torches carried by the footmen seem to have been infused with a life of their own and to need no bearers: 'Monsieur le Marquis, flambeau preceded . . . went from his carriage . . . All else was so quiet, that the flambeau carried up the steps, and the other flambeau held at the great door, burnt as if they were in a close room of state, instead of being in the open air' (Dickens 113). Like the Anglo-French language, the whole scene conveys a sense of familiarity (a castle lighted by torches) and a feeling of eeriness and foreignness.

Translating French Revolutionary Words

15 For Dickens, inventing a Franco-English idiom to re-enact the conditions that paved the way for the French Revolution also implied translating French revolutionary words into English. Some of these—'knitting', 'swinging lamps', '*Guillotine*' or '*Carmagnole*'—do not make sense without a background knowledge of their meaning in French culture or of the meaning of the French words they translate. Such is the case with Madame Defarge's knitting. Madame Defarge's needlework clashes with the social and literary model of the Angel in the House with which Victorian readers were familiar, in that it is not connected to the private sphere but foreshadows the character's role as the leader of revolutionary women in the Storming of the Bastille (Dickens Book II, chapters 21 and 22) and later as the head of the French '*tricoteuses*' (Dickens Book II, chapter 15) whom she epitomises. However Dickens chooses not to use the French word '*tricoteuse*', which might have immediately brought to mind the image of French women counting heads at the foot of the Guillotine. '*Tricoteuse*' was not listed in English dictionaries as it is today—it does not appear in *Johnson's Dictionary* reedited and updated in 1856[8]—but Thomas Carlyle uses it in his history of the French Revolution.[9] In preferring the English verb 'knitting', Dickens introduces the French Revolutionary meaning of the verb gradually. He infuses the verb with new connotations that result in the final image of the Vengeance and her friends sitting with their knitting at the foot of the Guillotine and waiting in vain for Madame Defarge's arrival (Dickens 358). Ironically, the latter will never be depicted in the novel doing what her French denomination as '*tricoteuse*' calls for, namely counting heads. The novel progressively spells out the French word '*tricoteuses*' in English. It does so first as a prophecy of what will happen if misery and oppression get worse: 'So much was closing in about the women who sat knitting, knitting, that they their very selves were

closing in around a structure yet unbuilt, where they were to sit knitting, knitting, counting dropping heads' (Dickens 179). Later, the novel shows the prophecy fulfilled, as the same women congregate to knit around the guillotine actually built: '. . . all are following to the Guillotine. In front of it, seated in chairs, as in a garden of public diversion, are a number of women, busily knitting. On one of the foremost chairs, stands The Vengeance, looking about for her friend' (Dickens 358).

16 Dickens's narrative builds up to this moment when the reader discovers or recognises the French meaning of '*tricoteuses*' in the English verb 'knitting'. To begin with, Madame Defarge is introduced as a French woman engaged in seemingly innocuous needlework relating to the private sphere. However this knitting is from the first associated with distasteful connotations: Madame Defarge is in a public house and has put her knitting aside to pick her teeth (Dickens 35). Defamiliarisation is produced in that the English connotations of the word 'knitting' do not quite apply. The activity itself remains the same but not what appertains to it: Madame Defarge not only carries out her knitting in the public sphere rather than in the private sphere but she does so in a place strongly denoting masculinity. Furthermore, her knitting is increasingly associated with repelling or sinister activities like picking her teeth, making shrouds (Dickens 160), or registering enemies of the Revolution (Dickens 170). By and by, the English verb to 'knit' becomes infused with negative images associated, in the English imagination, with the French '*tricoteuses*'.

17 Another English word that takes on an entirely new Revolutionary meaning in the novel is the word 'over-swinging lamp' (Dickens 50). Such street lamps are called in French '*lanterne en potence*'—'*potence*' meaning a support but also a gallows—and they have a very interesting revolutionary history. Just after the Storming of the Bastille, the revolutionary crowd hanged Joseph-François Foulon, the king's Counsellor, who was accused of having starved the people and even suggested that they eat grass.[10] Foulon is known to have been hanged, but the gallows he was hanged from was not ordinary: it was an over-swinging street lamp as shown on prints of the time.[11] The episode inspired the refrain of the Carmagnole which went: '*Ah ça ira, ça ira, ça ira les aristocrates à la lanterne/ Ah, ça ira, ça ira, les aristocrates on les pendra*.[12]' It also gave rise to a famous pamphlet by Camille Desmoulins written in 1789 and entitled '*Le Discours de la lanterne aux Parisiens*.' This discourse records the names of enemies of the Revolution and calls for rebellion—which, incidentally, is exactly what Madame Defarge does in the novel. The pamphlet indicts:

> Ces petits-maîtres & petites maîtresses, si voluptueux, si délicats, si parfumés, qui ne se montroient que dans leurs loges, ou dans d'élégants phaetons, qui chiffonnoient, dans les passes-temps de Messaline & de Sapho, l'ouvrage gallant de la demoiselle Bertin, à leurs soupers délicieux, en buvant des vins de Hongrie, trinquoient dans la coupe de la volupté à la destruction de Paris et à la ruine de la Nation Française. (Desmoulins 14)

18 In perusing Desmoulins's pamphlet, one feels as though one were reading Dickens's very descriptions of Monseigneur alluded to previously in this article.

19 In *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens builds on the French revolutionary definition of the '*lanterne en potence*'. The English word 'street lamp' is gradually transformed into a gallows to match its French revolutionary equivalent. The transformation is at first surreptitious: when Defarge helps smuggle Doctor Manette, who has been newly released from the Bastille, out of France, the carriage drives under 'the over-swinging lamps—swinging ever brighter in the better streets, and ever dimmer in the worse' and then 'under a short grove of feebler and feebler over-swinging lamps, out under the great grove of stars' (Dickens 50). The French swinging lamps reappear in the scene where Defarge comes back to the suburb of Saint Antoine accompanied by the mender of roads: 'It was high noontide, when two dusty men passed through his streets and under his swinging lamps: of whom, one was Monsieur Defarge: the other a mender of roads in a blue cap' (Dickens 159). The link between the 'swinging lamps' and the revolutionary '*lanternes de potence*' is made explicit in the scene of the Storming of the Bastille: 'The hour was come, when Saint Antoine was to execute his horrible idea of hoisting up men for lamps to show what he could be and do' (Dickens 211) and the word is spelled out in its full revolutionary meaning in the scene of the hanging of Foulon by the crowd: 'he was

hauled to the nearest street corner where one of the fatal lamps swung' (Dickens 216). Dickens was clearly playing on the English double meaning of the word 'to swing' which signifies 'to oscillate' but also 'to be hanged'—the latter sense echoing the French '*lanterne en potence*'. This scene reminds the reader of a cartoon by Gillray 'The Zenith of French Glory—The Pinnacle of Liberty' where a sans-culotte is triumphantly sitting on a swinging lamp playing the violin while Paris is burning and a priest and two monks are hanging from the lamp.[13] Dickens and Gillray were offering two different representations of the French revolutionary '*lanterne en potence*', one verbal and one visual.

20 The Guillotine itself and the Carmagnole are another interesting case. These two French words appear unchanged in the narrative but they do not make sense until the reader is provided with their definitions in the form of a succession of gruesome images. The narrative first circles around the word 'Guillotine' without actually spelling it out: 'It is likely enough that, rooted in the woods of France and Norway, there were growing trees, when that sufferer was put to death, already marked by the Woodman, Fate, to come down and be sawed into boards, to make a certain movable framework with a sack and a knife in it, terrible in history' (Dickens 8). When he beholds Darnay, who has come back to France and has been immediately arrested, Defarge considers the danger he has incurred in returning: 'In the name of that sharp female newly-born, and called La Guillotine, why did you come to France?' (Dickens 243). The Guillotine is mentioned in the form of a personification and alluded to more and more frequently but the actual machine, with its sliding blade is not described as such. It is only hinted at through a series of images presented in the form of a succession of jokes reminiscent of a guessing game:

> It was the popular theme for jests; it was the best cure for headache, it infallibly prevented the hair from turning grey, it imparted a peculiar delicacy to the complexion, it was the National Razor which shaved close . . . (Dickens 262)

21 The French word 'Guillotine' is also alluded to circuitously via the words of the wood-sawyer who compares his saw to the sinister device, triggering Lucie's horror: 'See my saw! I call it my Little Guillotine. La, la, la; La, la la! And off his head comes!' (Dickens 266). The victims of decapitations by the Guillotine are listed but the decapitations themselves are not shown—'Lovely girls; bright women, brown-haired, black-haired, and grey; youths; stalwart men and old; gentle born and peasant born; all red wine for La Guillotine' (Dickens 264). In the concluding scene of the novel, decapitation is described through typography: a dash symbolises the sliding blade in the case of the seamstress: 'she goes before him—is gone'; and the number 'Twenty-Three' indicating Carton's death is followed by a blank in the text punctuated by a long black line (Dickens 360). To describe the French Guillotine, Dickens creates a set of images in which the device is paradoxically both omnipresent and absent and therefore made all the more terrifying.

22 The word '*Carmagnole*' also gives rise to an interesting image. It is depicted as a horrific sight perverting innocence, purity and beauty. The Carmagnole described in *A Tale of Two Cities* is a frantic dance, subverting the Christmas celebrations by its chaotic, indecent and subhuman moves accompanied by jarring sounds.

> . . . a throng of people came pouring round the corner by the prison wall, in the midst of whom was the wood-sawyer hand in hand with The Vengeance. There could not be fewer than five hundred people, and they were dancing like five thousand demons. There was no other music than their own singing. They danced to the popular Revolution song, keeping a ferocious time that was like a gnashing of teeth in unison. Men and women danced together, women danced together, men danced together, as hazard had brought them together. (Dickens 267)

23 The words of the song itself are not mentioned. Dickens's description inspired an illustration for this scene by Fred Barnard in 1870, a picture that fully renders the idea of chaos and sinister frenzy conveyed by this episode. However this appears to be a very English translation of the word '*Carmagnole*'. French popular images of this dance produced in 1792, at the time when the song was written, were more festive, colourful and harmonious.[14] Again this shows that Dickens not only translated the French Revolution into English, he also interpreted it by infusing it with English fears and clichés. However Dickens's representation also corresponded to the very words of the Carmagnole which, in spite of idyllic visual

renderings of the dance by French artists, was in fact all about bloodthirsty revenge against the monarchy and the aristocracy. The song's refrain takes up the theme of hanging aristocrats from swinging lamps. Thus while answering English anxieties about the French Revolution, Dickens's rendering of the Carmagnole was also in keeping with its very spirit and with that of the period of Terror during which it was written.

24 Dickens's Franco-English idiom is not just linguistic, it is also a visual one. Pictorial transpositions provide a complement to verbal transpositions from French into English. This translation of the French Revolution into English proves complex and subtle. Far from offering mere wordplay and sensational images, it reveals interesting interpretations of the French Revolution seen through English eyes and recreated in words and word-pictures for English-speaking readers. Dickens's translation of the French Revolution into English involves the invention of a new language that reveals interesting metaphysical questions. It also conjures up the Revolution and its warning signs in words and, last but not least, it transforms French Revolutionary words into striking English verbal cartoons or infuses English words with strong revolutionary meaning. In short, Dickens provided his English readers with a unique insight into pre-revolutionary and Revolutionary France and proved as subtle a translator of French cultural specificities as his character Charles Darnay, whose elegant translations go beyond 'mere dictionary knowledge' and convey to those he teaches a real feel of the increasingly interesting 'circumstances of his country' (Dickens 124).

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Notes

1 Quoted in *Charles Dickens: A Tale of Two Cities*. Ed. Harold Bloom. (New York : Chelsea House, 2006) 72.

2 In this respect, Dickens’s foreign language becomes a vehicle for enlightenment and a philosophy of the French Revolution is brought to light. See Adorno 190 and Lecercle 17–36 on foreign words and a philosophy of language. Jean-Jacques Lecercle contends that foreign words defamiliarise language and enable critical thought to emerge.

3 Eugène DELACROIX, *La Liberté guidant le peuple*, 1830, huile sur toile, 260 × 325 cm, Louvre-Lens, Lens.

4 See also Lecercle 24 on the infusion of new meaning into set phrases and dead metaphors through such literal translations.

5 See James Gillray, *Un Petit Souper à la Parisienne: a Family of Sans-Culottes Refreshing After the Fatigues of the Day*, 1792, hand-coloured etching, 28.7 × 36.2 cm, London, National Portrait Gallery. Interestingly, Dickens also uses a cannibalistic metaphor in his novel.

6 See Dickens 1859, 383 for Andrew Sanders’s allusion to Mercier’s chapter entitled ‘*Filles d’Opéra*’ in his *Tableaux de Paris*. Mercier comments on the custom of noblemen ‘taking up’ actresses and opera-girls.

7 See Freud, ‘The Uncanny’ (1919).

8 See P. Austin Nuttall, *Johnsons’s Dictionary of the English Language for the Use of Schools and General Students*, London, G. Routledge & Co, 1856.

9 See Carlyle 1837: ‘*Citoyennes* who bring their seam with them, or their knitting-needles; and shriek or knit as the case needs; famed *Tricoteuses*, Patriot Knitters’ (chapter 3. 2. V). ‘The Patriots, in Mountain and Galleries, or taking counsel nightly in Section-house, in Mother Society, amid their shrill *Tricoteuses*, have to watch lynx-eyed; to give voice when needful; occasionally very loud’ (chapter 3. 2. VI). ‘The female Jacobins, famed *Tricoteuses* with knitting-needles, take flight; are met at the doors by a Gilt Youthhood and “mob of four thousand persons;” are hooted, flouted, hustled; fustigated, in a scandalous manner, *cotillons retroussés*;—and vanish in mere hysterics’ (chapter 3.7. IV).

10 This historical episode is mentioned by Carlyle in *The French Revolution: A History* (Chapter 1.5.IX entitled “La Lanterne”).

11 See the frontispiece to the *Discours de la lanterne aux Parisiens* (1789) displayed by the Centre historique des Archives nationales :

12 See the definition of ‘*lanterne*’ in the dictionary *Le Robert.*

13 See James Gillray, *The Zenith of French Glory. The Pinnacle of Liberty*, 1793, Hand-coloured etching, 35.6 × 25.2 cm, London, British Museum.

14 *La Carmagnole*, 1792, gravure, Paris, Musée Carnavalet.

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Droits d’auteur

Résumés

Traduire la Révolution française en anglais dans *A Tale of Two Cities*

Cet article s'emploie à mettre en lumière ce que Dickens avait en tête quand il inventa ce que Sylvère Monod appela une « langue anglo-française » (Monod 429-31) composée de mots anglais mais empruntant des formes syntaxiques au français, ou bien traduisant des expressions françaises de manière littérale. Il sera démontré que cette création dickensienne d'un anglais inédit, parsemé de gallicismes, participait d'une stratégie visant à traduire la Révolution française en anglais. Par le biais de cette novlangue, Dickens s'efforça de saisir la singularité de la Révolution et de la rendre compréhensible pour des lecteurs britanniques. Ce sabir anglo-français s'avère donc plus complexe et plus subtil qu'il ne semblait l'être à première vue. Loin de ne proposer que des jeux de mots et des images sensationnalistes, il révèle une interprétation intéressante de la Révolution française.

This article highlights what Dickens was trying to achieve in *A Tale of Two Cities* when he invented what Sylvère Monod called an "Anglo-French language" (Monod 429-31) composed of English words but borrowing syntactic forms from the French or translating French set phrases literally into English. It argues that Dickens's creation of a new form of English sprinkled with Gallicisms was part and parcel of a strategy to translate the French Revolution into English. He used this newspeak to fathom the Revolution's singularity and render it understandable to English-speaking readers. Dickens's Anglo-French lingua proves more complex and subtle than it may have seemed at first sight. Far from offering mere wordplay and sensational images, it reveals an interesting interpretation of the French Revolution.

Entrées d'index

Mots-clés : Dickens (Charles), A Tale of Two Cities, Révolution française, traduction, langage anglo-français, métaphysique, tricoteuses, lanternes en potence, guillotine, Carmagnole
Keywords : Dickens (Charles), A Tale of Two Cities, French Revolution, translation, Anglo-French language, metaphysics, tricoteuses, swinging lamps, guillotine, Carmagnole

Notes de l'auteur

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